

So I hope this day will be important not only for our forestlands but the preservation of fresh water and biodiversity and recreational opportunities. I hope it will be the first step in America resuming a path of responsible leadership toward the environmental future we will increasingly share with our neighbors all across the globe. And I hope all of you will always be very proud of the role you have played in this special day.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. at Reddish Knob Overlook. In his remarks, he referred to Peter Pinchot, environmental consultant, Pinchot Institute for Conservation, and grandson of Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service.

Memorandum on Protection of Forest “Roadless” Areas

October 13, 1999

Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture

Subject: Protection of Forest “Roadless” Areas

At the start of this century, President Theodore Roosevelt dedicated this Nation to the conservation of natural resources—our land, our water, our wildlife, and all the other precious gifts nature had bestowed upon us. One of America’s great central tasks, he declared, is “leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.”

In pursuit of that goal, President Roosevelt established new protections for millions upon millions of acres across America. His remarkable legacy includes 5 national parks, 18 national monuments, and dozens of wildlife refuges. Among his most notable conservation achievements were the consolidation of 65 million acres of Federal forest reserves into the National Forest System, and the creation of the United States Forest Service to ensure wise stewardship of these lands for future generations. In this effort, he was guided by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service and a founder of America’s conservation movement.

Today, the National Forest System has grown to 192 million acres of forests and

grasslands in 46 States and territories. These lands provide a broad array of benefits to the American people. They support rural industries, sustain fish and wildlife, generate drinking water for 60 million Americans, and provide important recreation opportunities to an increasingly urban population.

Over the years, unfortunately, our Nation has not always honored President Roosevelt’s vision. Too often, we have favored resource extraction over conservation, degrading our forests and the critical natural values they sustain. As the consequences of these actions have become more apparent, the American people have expressed growing concern and have called on us to restore balance to their forests.

My Administration has made significant strides in improving the management of our Federal forestlands. Beginning with the adoption of a comprehensive, science-based forest plan for the Pacific Northwest, we have sought to strengthen protections for wildlife, water quality, and other vital ecological values, while ensuring a steady, sustainable supply of timber and other commodities to support stable rural economies. The new forest planning regulation proposed last month represents another major step in that direction.

It is time now, I believe, to address our next challenge—the fate of those lands within the National Forest System that remain largely untouched by human intervention.

A principal defining characteristic of these lands is that they do not have, and in most cases never have had, roads across them. We know from earlier inventories that there are more than 40 million acres of “roadless” area within the National Forest System, generally in parcels of 5,000 acres or more. A temporary moratorium on road building in most of these areas has allowed us time to assess their ecological, economic, and social values and to evaluate long-term options for their management.

In weighing the future of these lands, we are presented with a unique historic opportunity. From the Appalachian Mountains to the Sierra Nevada, these are some of the last, best unprotected wildlands in America. They are vital havens for wildlife—indeed, some

are absolutely critical to the survival of endangered species. They are a source of clean, fresh water for countless communities. They offer unparalleled opportunities for hikers, campers, hunters, anglers, and others to experience unspoiled nature. In short, these lands bestow upon us unique and irreplaceable benefits. They are a treasured inheritance—enduring remnants of an untrammelled wilderness that once stretched from ocean to ocean.

Accordingly, I have determined that it is in the best interest of our Nation, and of future generations, to provide strong and lasting protection for these forests, and I am directing you to initiate administrative proceedings to that end.

Specifically, I direct the Forest Service to develop, and propose for public comment, regulations to provide appropriate long-term protection for most or all of these currently inventoried “roadless” areas, and to determine whether such protection is warranted for any smaller “roadless” areas not yet inventoried. The public, and all interested parties, should have the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed regulations. In the final regulations, the nature and degree of protections afforded should reflect the best available science and a careful consideration of the full range of ecological, economic, and social values inherent in these lands.

I commend you, along with the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, Jim Lyons, the Chief of the Forest Service, Michael Dombeck, and the entire Forest Service for your leadership in strengthening and modernizing the management of our Federal forests—lands held by us in trust for all Americans and for future generations. With the new effort we launch today, we can feel confident that we have helped to fulfill and extend the conservation legacy of Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, and to ensure that the 21st century is indeed a new century for America’s forests.

William J. Clinton

Statement on Floods and Mudslides in Mexico

October 13, 1999

On behalf of the American people, I want to express our deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives and homes in the devastating floods and mudslides in Mexico, which have taken hundreds of lives and left tens of thousands of people homeless. It was less than a month ago that Hurricane Floyd brought flooding to the States along our own East Coast, reminding us of the pain such tragedies can bring and of the importance of neighbor helping neighbor in times of crisis. In the days ahead, our thoughts and prayers will be with our good friends, the people of Mexico, as they work to rebuild from these terrible tragedies. As a people and a Government, we stand ready to help in any way we can.

Statement on the Conclusion of the Independent Counsel’s Investigation of Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt

October 13, 1999

I am very pleased by today’s announcement concerning Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. As I said at the beginning of this inquiry, Bruce Babbitt is a man of the highest integrity, and I was convinced that he would be vindicated. Secretary Babbitt’s record of superb stewardship of our Nation’s lands speaks for itself, and I look forward to his continuing service to our country, its people, and its extraordinary God-given resources.

Statement on Hate Crimes Legislation

October 13, 1999

It has been a year since the murder of Matthew Shepard, and 2 years since I first proposed to strengthen the Nation’s hate crime laws. During this time, hundreds of Americans have been injured or killed, simply because of who they are. In response to